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SUBJECT: SWISS TO VOTE NOVEMBER 29 ON WHETHER TO SUPPORT  
"PEOPLE'S INITIATIVE" TO BAN MINARETS

11. (SBU) Summary: On November 29, Swiss citizens will vote nationwide on whether to support a "people's initiative" calling for a ban on the construction of minarets in Switzerland. The initiative was launched by members of rightwing parties. The initiators of the proposal contend that minarets symbolize a political claim to power that challenges the Swiss federal constitution and the system of law. The Federal Council (Executive Cabinet) and Parliament have taken clear public positions recommending that Swiss voters reject the initiative as contrary to Swiss law and human rights obligations. Swiss political parties from the left to the center-right, as well as Switzerland's main churches, business federations and human rights experts all reject the initiative. According to a survey carried out by a leading research and polling institute in mid-November, 53 percent of the respondents rejected the initiative; 10 percent were undecided. Most observers believe the initiative will not pass, but the outcome is likely to be close. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On November 29, Swiss citizens will vote nationwide on whether to support a "people's initiative" calling for a ban on the construction of minarets in Switzerland. The initiative was launched by members of the ultra-conservative Federal Democratic Union (EDU) and rightwing Swiss People's Party (SVP). Both the EDU and SVP subsequently endorsed the initiative, after the necessary 100,000 validated signatures were collected to force a nationwide vote. The initiators of the proposal contend that minarets symbolize a political claim to power that challenges the Swiss federal constitution and the system of law. Critics counter that the initiative is only a proxy for the initiators' anti-immigration agenda.

13. (SBU) The Federal Council (Executive Cabinet) and Parliament have taken clear public positions recommending that Swiss voters reject the initiative as contrary to Swiss law and human rights obligations. Swiss political parties from the left to the center-right, as well as Switzerland's main churches, business federations and human rights experts all reject the initiative.

14. (SBU) There are approximately 160 mosques and cultural centers throughout the country, four of which have minarets. There are approximately 350,000 persons of Muslim faith living in Switzerland, constituting the second largest religious community in the country. Most Muslims in Switzerland are from Turkey or the former Yugoslavia.

15. (SBU) According to a survey carried out by a leading research and polling institute in Switzerland in mid-November, 53 percent of the respondents rejected the initiative; 10 percent were undecided. For the initiative to be adopted, both a majority of the electorate and a majority of the cantons (states) would have to approve it. Most observers believe the initiative will not pass, but hedge their comments, saying that the outcome is likely to be close.  
BEYER